



**EPIC, Empowering People in Care**

**Pre-Budget 2022 Submission**

**August 2021**

## Table of Contents

<b>1.</b>	<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2.</b>	<b>Key Statistics on Children in Care .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>3.</b>	<b>Social Worker Numbers .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>4.</b>	<b>Investment in Independent Advocacy .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>5.</b>	<b>National Support Service for Parents of Children in Care.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>6.</b>	<b>Educational Supports and Guidance.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>7.</b>	<b>Mental Health .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>8.</b>	<b>Aftercare .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>9.</b>	<b>Separated Children .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>10.</b>	<b>Foster Care.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>11.</b>	<b>Privately Operated Residential Centres.....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>12.</b>	<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>15</b>

## **1. Introduction**

EPIC Empowering People in Care (EPIC) is a national organisation that works with and for children and young people who are currently living in care or who have experience of living in care. This includes those in relative care, foster care, and residential care - including high support and special care - as well as children and young people accommodated by the State under section 5 of the Childcare Act, and those sentenced or remanded by the Courts. EPIC also works with young people preparing to leave care and in aftercare services, and with adults with care experience.

EPIC is the only independent organisation providing direct 1:1 advocacy support to children and young people in care. EPIC's advocacy service works to enable them to have their views and concerns heard and taken seriously, to empower them to speak for themselves, to help to resolve the issues and challenges they experience in care, to assist them in accessing the services and resources they need, and to bring about positive change in their experience of care and their lives generally.

EPIC makes this submission to Government in both our capacity as a National Children Rights Organisation, and on behalf of the children and young people in and leaving care with whom we work. Our submission is informed by the evidence base from our caseload, as well as our research and policy work.

It is EPIC's view that relevant Government Departments should, as a matter of course, care proof their budgets for children in care and leaving care. Care-proofing means that each Government Department would review and assess the impact their budgets will have on care-experienced children and young people. Furthermore, EPIC believes that children and young people with care experience should have positive actions applied to their circumstances. This group of children and young people are extremely vulnerable and the State as their 'corporate parent' has an obligation to fulfil in ensuring their safety and welfare, including upon transition to adulthood.

EPIC calls on the Government in Budget 2022 to retain a focus on the cohort of children and young people in its care by increasing Tusla's Budget, and prioritising investment across ten key areas:

- i.** Data collecting and sharing across all areas of care
- ii.** Increasing the number of social workers
- iii.** Investment in independent advocacy
- iv.** Establishment of a National Support Service for Parents of Children in Care
- v.** Improved educational supports and guidance
- vi.** Mental Health investment
- vii.** Extension of Aftercare Services
- viii.** Support for Unaccompanied Minors/Separated Children Seeking Asylum
- ix.** Strengthened funding for foster care
- x.** Balancing investment in Tusla managed residential care settings

**Overview:**

- Children and young people in the care of the State are often exceptionally vulnerable due to experiences of trauma through neglect and abuse prior to entering care and because of being in care. Budget 2022 must specifically name and prioritise this cohort and increase the Tusla Budget which has traditionally suffered from chronic under-funding.
- Care-experienced young people are forced to live independently and to leave their foster or residential care placement approximately 7 years earlier than their peers in the general population leave their family home.<sup>1</sup> These young people are particularly vulnerable as they typically have no family support and no 'safety net' to fall back on. The State, as their corporate parent, must ensure that young people have the skills and resilience to live independently on leaving care and be provided with the necessary supports in care, and in aftercare to make a smooth and successful transition to independent adulthood. It is incumbent on the State to ensure young people are appropriately supported so that they are more likely to fulfil their potential and be active contributing members of society.

**2. Key Statistics for Children and Young People in Care**

There were 5,884 children in care at the end of Q1 2021.<sup>2</sup> 65% (3,821) of children in care are in general foster care, 26% (1,517) are in relative foster care, 7% (425) are in residential care and 2% (121) are in "other" care placements.<sup>3</sup>

Significant improvements in data collection on children in care and with care experience has occurred in recent years. However, the type and quality of data recorded needs further improvement to ensure legislation, policies, strategies, and budgets can be developed in the most robust way. 12 years ago, The Report of the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse (Ryan Report) recommended that 'A longitudinal study be carried out over 10 years, which would follow young people who leave care in order to map their transition into adulthood.' A [feasibility study](#) completed in 2018 concluded that such a study would contribute to advancing critical understanding of the needs and experiences of children and young people in and leaving care, and that conducting such a significant study was

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<sup>1</sup> Eurostat; *Bye Bye Parents, when do young Europeans flee the nest*; available at: [Bye bye parents: when do young Europeans flee the nest? - Products Eurostat News - Eurostat \(europa.eu\)](#) [accessed 31.08.21].

<sup>2</sup> Tusla, *Quarterly Service Performance and Activity Report Quarter 1 2021*.p.5.  
[https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Q1\\_2021\\_Service\\_Performance\\_and\\_Activity\\_Report\\_Final.pdf](https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Q1_2021_Service_Performance_and_Activity_Report_Final.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

eminently possible. Since then, a Working Group has been set up in the Minister's Department to advise on this objective but with no clear timeline for completion.

**Recommendation:**

Building on the initial work undertaken by the DCEDIY and Tusla, implement the Ryan Report Recommendation by providing specific and dedicated funding to advance a multi-annual longitudinal study on children in care and leaving care to enable robust and evidence based policy making and service delivery.

### 3. Social Worker Numbers

When a child is in the care system, their most basic requirements are that they have a social worker and that their care plan is up to date. Unfortunately, these requirements are not always met. Currently, only 92% of children in care nationally have an allocated social worker (against a target of 100%) at the end of Q1 2021; down one percentage point from Q4 2020.<sup>4</sup>

EPIC welcomes the “[C]onversion of 408 agency workers to staff contracts, conducted in Q1 2020, (which) has since significantly reduced agency staff usage”,<sup>5</sup> and which leads to greater certainty and consistency. However, there are still “494 children awaiting allocation of a social worker; 95 (24%) more than at the end of Q4 2020 (399)”.<sup>6</sup> EPIC has serious concerns that these young people are not getting the service and support that they require and that this will have a significant impact on their wellbeing.

In addition, at the end of March 2021, 227 children lacked an up-to-date care plan, 27 more than Q4 2020<sup>7</sup>. This demonstrates that progress is insufficient as only “96% of children in care had an up-to-date care plan, down one percentage points from Q4 2020 (97%).”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Tusla, *Quarterly Service Performance and Activity Report Quarter 1 2021*.p.38

[https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Q1\\_2021\\_Service\\_Performance\\_and\\_Activity\\_Report\\_Final.pdf](https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Q1_2021_Service_Performance_and_Activity_Report_Final.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Clarke, L. & Mahon, D.,. *Spending Review 2020. Tusla: Staffing and Workforce Planning*, Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. October 2020. P.2.

<sup>6</sup>Tusla, *Quarterly Service Performance and Activity Report Quarter 1 2021*.p.38

[https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Q1\\_2021\\_Service\\_Performance\\_and\\_Activity\\_Report\\_Final.pdf](https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Q1_2021_Service_Performance_and_Activity_Report_Final.pdf)

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.* p.39.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

Lastly, increased investment in supports, including training and development, must be initiated to ensure that social workers remain in post, do not experience burn-out, and are incentivised to remain in the job.

**Recommendation:**

- i. Further funding needs to be made available in Budget 2022 to increase the number of social workers, to ensure that those in post are retained and to guarantee that all children in care have an allocated social worker and an up-to-date care plan.

#### **4. Investment in Independent Advocacy**

The need for increased investment in independent advocacy for children and young people in care and with care experience has never been greater. More children and young people contact EPIC every year to help resolve obstacles around care placements, accommodation, family contact, aftercare and access to services. Independent advocacy demonstrates clear value-for-money by resolving issues before they result in lengthy and costly Court proceedings which are rarely in the best interest of the child.

The Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Child Abuse (The Ryan Report, 2009) unambiguously affirmed the need for children in care to have the support of an independent advocate, stating *“Children in care are often isolated with their concerns, without an adult to whom they can talk. Children communicate best when they feel they have a protective figure in whom they can confide. The Department of Health and Children must examine international best practice to establish the most appropriate method of giving effect to this recommendation.”*<sup>9</sup> The report further asserted that *“The HSE and Irish Youth Justice Service will ensure that all young people in care and detention are made aware of the Irish Association of Young People in Care (now EPIC) and will support children should they wish to contact or become involved in the service.”*

Despite welcome efforts made by Tusla in recent years to increase the budget for independent advocacy, year on year the number of advocacy cases received by EPIC has increased from 123 cases in 2012, to 843 cases in 2019 - an increase of 585%.<sup>10</sup> EPIC has real concerns about the situation of

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<sup>9</sup> Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse Report, Vol. IV, Dublin, 2009, p.463.

<sup>10</sup> Daly, F., Report on EPIC Advocacy Cases 2019. August 2020. p. 1.

children and young people who are unable to access an advocate, especially those who may lack both a social worker and an advocate.

**Recommendation:**

- i. Budget 2022 should provide additional funding to strengthen independent advocacy provision for children and young people in care and with care experience.

## **5. National Support Service for Parents of Children in Care**

In line with our mandate, EPIC also works with parents who have themselves been through the care system. EPIC's data shows that parental rights has been in the top five presenting issues of the over 18 year olds with whom we work for many years. We have seen a 500% increase in the number of cases in which we support care-leaver parents from 2013 - 2019. EPIC currently works with parents who have agreed to voluntary care agreements with Tusla as well as those going through the courts for Supervision Orders or Care Orders.

A recent study into the experiences of parents of children in care found four main themes emerge; a feeling of powerlessness, the value of relationships, the importance of communication and systemic factors.<sup>11</sup> Parents who have been through care themselves often have very little social support. They can also be reluctant to ask for help. This highlights the vulnerability of this cohort of young people.

At present there are very limited resources for parents of children in care. EPIC only works with parents if they have care experience themselves, while Clare Care and the Limerick Social Services Council are the only two designated services in Ireland for parents of children in care. Clare Care's latest figures for 2018 show that they dealt with 27 parents in relation to 34 children in care.<sup>12</sup> In Limerick their numbers for the same year was 57 families receiving a service, with 32 new referrals in that year.<sup>13</sup> When this is compared with Tusla's figures for the MidWest in 2018, we see that there were 581

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<sup>11</sup> Lynch, S. and Hynan, M., *I'm broken inside but I'm smiling out through my teeth: an exploration of the experiences of parents who have children in foster care*, in Foster, Issue 7, 2019, Dublin, IFCA. p.29.

<sup>12</sup> Clare Care Annual Report 2019, p.9.

[https://www.clarecare.ie/wpcontent/uploads/2021/01/Clarecare Annual Report 2019.pdf](https://www.clarecare.ie/wpcontent/uploads/2021/01/Clarecare%20Annual%20Report%202019.pdf)

[accessed 1.09.21].

<sup>13</sup> Limerick Social Services Council Annual Report 2019, p.6.

<https://www.lssc.ie/index.cfm/api/render/file/?method=inline&fileID=8B88B76A-155D-D234-0AAEC2B5A9C37E67> [accessed 1.09.21].

children from that area in care at the end of December 2018.<sup>14</sup> As these numbers illustrate, only a small fraction of families in the area are availing of the service.

Parents of children in care should be supported to understand the care system, navigate court proceedings, engage with social services, prepare for professionals meetings, and to attend their children's Child in Care reviews. A National Support Service could provide information, emotional, encouragement and practical support to parents, all of which is lacking at present which impacts on parents, children, carers and communities. Parents of children in care deserve and need a dedicated, long term support service which would be an important body to advance children's rights – benefiting both parents and children.

**Recommendation:**

- i. EPIC urges the Government to ensure that Budget 2022 allocates funding to establish a National Support Service for Parents of Children in Care, based on research which has been commissioned by Tusla, and supported by the evidence base from EPIC, Clare Care and the Limerick Social Services Council model.

## **6. Educational Supports and Guidance**

As a specific cohort, children in care have, on average, some of the lowest levels of educational attainment in comparison to their non-care experienced peers, and their outcomes continue to be a major concern in all countries in which relevant data is collected. The implications of this are far reaching and extend beyond education, since the educational outcomes of children and young people with care experience are strongly linked to subsequent employment,<sup>15</sup> housing,<sup>16</sup> mental and physical health<sup>17</sup> and offending.<sup>18</sup> It is estimated that in every primary school in Ireland there is at least one

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<sup>14</sup> Tusla, *Quarterly Service and Performance Report-Quarter 4 2018*, p.31.

[https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Q4\\_2018\\_Service\\_Performance\\_and\\_Activity\\_Report\\_Final.pdf](https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Q4_2018_Service_Performance_and_Activity_Report_Final.pdf) [accessed 1.09.21].

<sup>15</sup> Hook, J. L., & Courtney, M. E. (*Employment outcomes of former foster youth as young adults: The importance of human, personal, and social capital*. Children and Youth Services Review, 33(10), 2011.pgs. 1855–1865.

<sup>16</sup> Davison, M. S., & Burris, E. W. *Transitioning foster care youth and their risk for homelessness: Policy, program, and budgeting shortcomings*. Human Welfare, 3(1), 2014, pgs. 22–33.

<sup>17</sup> Dixon, J. *Young people leaving care: Health, well-being and outcomes*. Child & Family Social Work, 13(2), 2008. Pgs. 207–217.

<sup>18</sup> Cusick, G. R., Havlicek, J. R., & Courtney, M. E., *Risk for arrest: The role of social bonds in protecting foster youth making the transition to adulthood*. American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 82(1), 2012. Pgs.19–31.



young person in that school who is in care, and in every secondary school there are between four and five young people in care.<sup>19</sup> Children in care require distinct recognition and supports. This has been articulated by Dr Paul Downes, Associate Professor of Psychology of Education, Director of the Educational Disadvantage Centre, Institute of Education, Dublin City University, who highlights that “A category for children in care is absent in the Department of Education and Skills databases of POD (Primary Online Database) and PPOD (Post Primary Online Database). Whole school plans must provide evidence of addressing the needs of CIC [children in care].”<sup>20</sup> He goes on to state that “school based emotional counselling/therapeutic supports for this and other vulnerable groups” is necessary and that other additional mentoring supports in schools for these students and their carers are needed.”<sup>21</sup> “Whole-school plans must provide evidence of addressing the needs of children in care. Trauma-informed and attachment-aware practices, training and policies in education are required at all levels.”<sup>22</sup>

Under achievement at primary and secondary level means that young people who have been in the care system are significantly less likely to go on to further and higher education than not only their non-care experienced peers, but also than other disadvantaged cohorts of young people. The UK Office for Students (OFS) found that care leavers had:

- Lower school attainment
- A lack of positive role models and low expectations from carers and advisers
- Low aspirations and concerns about being able to afford higher education
- Lack of information and advice before and when applying to higher education
- Difficulty accessing the financial support they needed and problems with accommodation.

An exploratory study carried out in 2013 by the ESRI and Trinity College, funded by the Ombudsman for Children’s Office, found that children and young people with care experience in Ireland tend to face more challenges than their peers in fulfilling their potential in education, due to their personal

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<sup>19</sup> Downes, Dr. P. et al., *Educational Needs of Children in Care*, Letter to the Irish Times, 22 September 2020. <https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/letters/educational-needs-of-children-in-care-1.4360745> [accessed: 21 July 2021].

<sup>20</sup> Downes, Dr. P., *The Holistic Educational Needs of Children and Young People in Care: Placing an Invisible Issue on the National Policy Agenda*. Keynote Presentation, Making Care Fair, Equality through Equity - Education, EPIC (Empowering People in Care) Webinar. 16 February 2021. p.5. <https://www.dcu.ie/sites/default/files/inline-files/epicconferencekeynotepresentation-feb-2021.pdf> [accessed: 21 July 2021].

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* p.3.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

and familial circumstances.<sup>23</sup> Despite this, children and young people in care and care leavers have been largely overlooked in Irish educational policy measures or statements to date, and were not, for example, identified in the National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015-2019. Other plans and reviews have similarly overlooked this significantly disadvantaged cohort of children and young people.<sup>24</sup>

**Recommendations:**

Budget 2022 must:

- i. Name children in state care and with care experience as a distinct group requiring additional support.
- ii. Provide additional funding for schools for counselling/therapeutic supports, and guidance.
- iii. Increase funding for a higher education access strategy that specifically supports children and young people with care experience.
- iv. Include funding at third level institutions to ensure that young people with care experience can access a consistent, named, knowledgeable single point of contact at 3rd level, who will advocate on behalf of students with care experience.
- v. Ensure funding is made available to expand the data gathered and published on the educational outcomes of children and young people in care and with care experience at primary, secondary and higher level.

## 7. Mental Health

EPIC has long called for mental health support and therapeutic support for all children in care as a matter of course, as well as continued therapeutic support in aftercare and beyond. The current access route is too slow, and often inaccessible to those who have aged out of care but still require support due to having been in care as a child. Unresolved trauma can shape how children and young people

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<sup>23</sup> Darmody, M.; McMahon, L.; Banks, J.; ESRI; Gilligan, G.; Children's Research Centre; Trinity College; *Education of Children in Care in Ireland: An Exploratory Study*; 2013. Available at: (PDF) Education of children in care in Ireland: An exploratory study | Merike Darmody - Academia.edu (accessed 05.21).

<sup>24</sup> By way of example, they were not identified in:

- The Higher Education Authority 2018-2022 Strategic Plan
- CUMASÚ Empowering through learning Statement of Strategy 2019-2021
- The National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030.

respond to everyday life experiences, including how they respond to the services provided by professionals.

**Recommendations:**

Budget 2022 must:

- i. Prioritise investment in mental health, to ensure that the vulnerable can access appropriate, trauma-informed supports as and when they need them. Covid-19 has increased the need for mental health supports amongst care-experienced children and youth, and easy access must be prioritised. Waiting lists should not occur.
- ii. Provide funding specifically to enable care leavers to easily access trauma-informed mental health supports after they age out of care.

## **8. Aftercare**

Despite improvements in the provision of aftercare services to young people preparing to leave care and leaving care, EPIC nonetheless recommends that the review of the Child Care Act 1991 must include the provision of aftercare services on a legislative footing. Furthermore, Every aftercare plan should be enforceable, measurable, and consistent across the country.

Currently there is significant inconsistency in aftercare planning. The right for every child in care to have a comprehensive, needs assessed plan should be reviewed to ensure sufficient resources, consistency and enforcement of aftercare packages. In addition to this, aftercare supports must also be extended beyond the age of 21 and 23 years. The ultimate aim of the aftercare plan and supports should be to ensure that young people are independent and able to be self-sufficient by the time they age out of aftercare. EPIC is firmly of the view that aftercare supports should be extended to 26 years of age depending on the individual needs of the young person in question. Tusla, as the corporate parent, must adopt the same approach as a caring supportive family, providing assistance and guidance for a significant amount of time beyond the current age limits. The improvements and amendments to aftercare over the last number of years are very welcome, but the fact remains that providing an aftercare plan is a hollow statement if it is not supported by adequate resources and funding up to a reasonable age. In addition, the current extension of aftercare to 23 for those in higher education is discriminatory and must be removed.

**Recommendations:**

Budget 2022:

- i. Must provide additional funding to ensure aftercare supports are extended to 26 years of age on a needs-basis for all care-experienced youth, regardless of educational status. This would support the Programme for Government commitments on Housing for All, supporting vulnerable young people, and the development of a National Youth Homelessness Strategy.
- ii. Must ensure Aftercare is adequately and equitably funded, and that all aftercare plans are enforced.

**9. Unaccompanied Minors/ Separated Children Seeking Asylum**

Unaccompanied minors/ separated children seeking asylum who have not had their refugee status determined before they turn 18 are a small category of children that must not be overlooked. It is EPIC's view that all unaccompanied minors must be considered a child in care first and foremost and should be provided with all attendant safeguards and supports until a decision is made on the child or young person's status, including through the provision of aftercare services. This is in the best short and long-term interest of the child and the State.

**Recommendation:**

- i. Budget 2022 must ensure that funding is made available so that all unaccompanied minors/separated children in and leaving care can be provided with specific supports, including a full aftercare package, access to accommodation, and education.

## 10. Foster care

Foster care in Ireland has been the mainstay of children in care over the last number of years. The overall percentage of children in foster care is consistently in the nineties and is currently 91%.<sup>25</sup> However, Tusla have stated that “the number of general foster carers has fallen year on year over the five years 2015-2019 and is down 13% overall.”<sup>26</sup> What is particularly concerning is that “the number of relative foster carers has fallen year on year since 2016 and is down 10% overall.”<sup>27</sup> The support of close family for children in need or care should always be a priority, and it is alarming that this figure has dropped dramatically in recent years. Contrasting this “the number of private foster carers has increased and is up 57% on 2015.” The privatisation of childcare in Ireland is increasing, and the outsourcing of fostering to private providers reflects this. Tusla has explained that the increase in private foster carers “reflects the ongoing difficulty in recruiting suitable foster carers to meet demand and the complex / special needs of some children requiring placement.”<sup>28</sup>

Another by-product of the falling number of foster carers is the growing number of under 13-year-olds who are living in residential care (mainly privately run residential care homes). It has been reported that in 2019 there were 35 under 13 year old’s living in private residential centres, which makes up 15% of the total number of children living in residential care.<sup>29</sup> This is contrary to Tusla’s policy which states that Tusla does not place children aged 12 years or younger in residential care barring exceptional circumstances.<sup>30</sup>

EPIC is also concerned by comments made by Minister O’Gorman in July this year when he replied to a parliamentary question from Ms. Brid Smith, TD that “there are strategic plans to increase Tusla capacity in Children’s residential services”<sup>31</sup>. EPIC believes that these monies would be better invested in fostering. Through EPIC’s own advocacy work, we have heard, especially in the cities and larger towns, that the housing crisis is also having an impact on the recruitment of foster carers. The high

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<sup>25</sup> Tusla, *Quarterly Service Performance and Activity Report Quarter 1 2021*.p.36.

[https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Q1\\_2021\\_Service\\_Performance\\_and\\_Activity\\_Report\\_Final.pdf](https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Q1_2021_Service_Performance_and_Activity_Report_Final.pdf)

<sup>26</sup> Tusla, *Annual Review on the Adequacy of Child Care and Family Support Services Available 2019*, Dublin, 2020.p.82.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Donlevy, V., Day, L., Andriescu, M & Downes, P. *Assessment of the Implementation of the 2011 Council Recommendation on Policies to Reduce Early School Leaving* EUROPEAN COMMISSION Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture Schools and Multilingualism. 2019. p. 27.

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.gov.ie/en/policy-information/270443-alternative-care/#residential-care>

<sup>31</sup> *Dáil Debates, Reply to Brid Smith, Children in Care: 6 Jul 2021: Written answers (KildareStreet.com)* [accessed: 19 July 2021].

cost of buying or renting and the instability of tenants is a difficulty for current foster carers and those wishing to commence fostering.

**Recommendations:**

- i. EPIC is calling for Budget 2022 to increase funding to Tusla to recruit and support increased numbers of foster carers, to help bring the numbers in line with previous levels and to ensure that no child under 13 lives in a residential centre.
- ii. Funding must be made available in Budget 2022 to help retain the foster carers that are currently in place, and to ensure adequate supports are available to them. One proposal would be to instigate trauma informed care training to foster carers across the country, which has been very successful when provided in the Cork area.

## **11. Privately operated residential centres**

Over the past number of years there has been a marked increase in the number of private residential centres and a decline in the number of those which are Tusla operated. Currently, “the rate of increase for private residential services over the four-year period 2016-2019 is 87%.”<sup>32</sup> This has continued to rise and presently there are “142 non-statutory residential centres at the end Q1 2021.”<sup>33</sup> Of the “425 children in residential care 2,280 were in residential placements.”<sup>34</sup> This equates to 66% of all children in residential care who are now in a private placement. In terms of finance “[A] total (incl. administrative and development cost) of €192,962,018<sup>35</sup> was spent on residential care in 2019. Of that total, €109,559,728<sup>36</sup> or 57% of the total spend was on private residential services. This large sum of money, which is increasing dramatically year on year, shows a huge upsurge in the use of these services and the continued privatisation of childcare in Ireland.

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<sup>32</sup> R. Branigan & C. Madden, *Spending Review 2020 Tusla Residential Care Costs*. DCYA, October 2020. p. ix.

<sup>33</sup> Tusla, *Quarterly Service Performance and Activity Report Quarter 1 2021*. p.38

[https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Q1\\_2021\\_Service\\_Performance\\_and\\_Activity\\_Report\\_Final.pdf](https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Q1_2021_Service_Performance_and_Activity_Report_Final.pdf).

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* p.37.

<sup>35</sup> R. Branigan & C. Madden, *Spending Review 2020 Tusla Residential Care Costs*. DCYA, October 2020. p. 37

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* p. 38.

The costs of each of these placements is significant, and Tusla has stated that the “basic private ‘mainstream’ placement rate increased from €5,000 to €6,000 per week. Dual Occupancies were set at €8,500 and Single Occupancies at €13,500 per child per week.”<sup>37</sup>

As outlined above, the investment in private residential centres now vastly exceeds those made to Tusla run units. Privately run residential centres currently do not have the same standing regarding inspections as HIQA “do not currently have a legal remit to monitor private children’s residential centres.”<sup>38</sup> This is a major concern to EPIC, as evidence from other jurisdictions has documented significant gaps in oversight and regulation in private care facilities which has impacted on the safety and wellbeing of children and young people. EPIC is requesting that a full investment is made in Budget 2022 to support Tusla managed, publicly regulated residential centres.

Other issues that are apparent with private residential range from inexperienced and agency staff to differences in service delivery. An example of the latter is The Welltree Model of care that has been adopted in Tusla run homes, but agreements are not in place to ensure this is part of the care model in privately run care homes. Therefore, children in private residential centres are not always getting the same benefit in relation to therapeutic intervention.

Lastly, there is a danger that if a privately run service is not deemed profitable by their provider, that this service may be closed at short notice. This will lead to further disruption for those children and young people living there who will have to be relocated on an emergency basis.

**Recommendation:**

- i. EPIC urges the Government to review expenditure on private residential care and to prioritise investment to Tusla managed homes.

## **12. Conclusion**

EPIC calls on the Government in Budget 2022 to ensure that children in the care of the state, a very vulnerable cohort in society, are given priority and the help and support that they need to at least have parity with children in the general population. To guarantee this, positive action is needed as detailed in the recommendations made in this submission. Once a child enters care it is incumbent on

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> <https://www.hiqa.ie/areas-we-work/childrens-services> [accessed: 17 August 2021].

the State that they get the best care placement possible, as well as appropriate supports and timely interventions from all professionals. All children deserve the chance to grow and develop into happy, independent adults. Children in care, like all other children, are a vital and vibrant part of our community and their rights must be protected and upheld. These children and young people should have the best possible experience whilst in care and should leave care with equality of opportunity and outcome, in line with their non-care experienced peers. EPIC has outlined above how Budget 2022 can help make this a reality for children in care and with care experience, and we look forward to working in partnership with Government to achieve these aims.